

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

August 29, 2022

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable Deb Haaland  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Secretary Haaland:

Thank you for all the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Department of Interior (DOI) have done and are doing to suppress wildfires. We appreciate both of your experience and active leadership on this critically important topic. We are writing to request that as this year's wildfire season persists, you continue to engage in aggressive fire suppression tactics and take steps now to prepare additional resources to meet the growing need.

As you know, the consequences that wildfires have dealt our communities over the last several years are like nothing we have ever seen. In California, eight of the state's largest wildfires in recorded history have occurred in the last five years. In that timeframe, 10 million acres have burned, hundreds of people have died, more than 32,000 homes and businesses have been destroyed and an unacceptable level of greenhouse gases and other air pollutants have been released into the atmosphere.

Last year's extreme drought conditions have continued with little relief and in many parts of the country, water restrictions are expected to continue as supplies run low. During extreme drought, fuels for wildfire can dry out and become more flammable, increasing the probability of ignition and the rate at which fire spreads. We know that you both understand the devastation wildfires can have and that your departments are working to fight these fires as seriously as the moment demands, using every tool at your disposal.

We understand that one critically important tool to wildfire suppression is fire. It is necessary and often in our best interest to utilize smart burning tactics such as prescribed burns or backfires to help both prevent the start of and mitigate the spread of wildfires. However, it is crucial that these decisions be made thoughtfully, taking all factors – including drought, weather, terrain and threat to surrounding communities, etc. – into consideration. That said, when our community is at risk, it is vital that firefighters suppress ignitions immediately and fight fires round the clock to the extent possible to avoid destroyed homes, businesses and lives.

As you are well aware, wildfires do not respect jurisdictional boundaries, so constant communication between public and private entities is crucial. Federal and state agencies, emergency response personnel, local governments, and landowners are all critical partners in wildfire mitigation and suppression efforts. We appreciate every effort made to coordinate with each of these parties and encourage that coordination to continue at every step, so that everyone on the ground has the most up-to-date information and can utilize the most effective tactics.

Finally, recent reporting suggests that the United States Forest Service (USFS) faces a significant wildfire staffing shortfall despite the recent important pay increase included in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and other active efforts to fill the gaps. We understand that USDA and DOI have the ability to surge additional administration personnel to support firefighting functions, and that the Department of Defense (DOD) can provide additional firefighting support as well, including personnel if requested by the National Interagency Fire Center. In previous bad wildfire years, those resources have been called on once fire season is fully underway, but there is always a lag. Therefore, we ask that you do everything you can to start the process now, so that those additional firefighting resources are available immediately when they're needed.

Again, thank you for all the work that you and those on the ground are doing to help ensure the safety of our communities. We remain committed to working together to tackle this issue. Please do not hesitate to contact our offices if you are ever in need of assistance.

Sincerely,



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Mike Thompson  
Member of Congress



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Ken Calvert  
Member of Congress



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Dina Titus  
Member of Congress



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Jared Huffman  
Member of Congress



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MARK TAKANO  
Member of Congress



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Doug LaMalfa  
Member of Congress



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Mike Garcia  
Member of Congress



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Eric Swalwell  
Member of Congress



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Mark DeSaulnier  
Member of Congress



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Jimmy Panetta  
Member of Congress



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Julia Brownley  
Member of Congress



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Jim Costa  
Member of Congress



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Tom McClintock  
Member of Congress



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Pete Aguilar  
Member of Congress



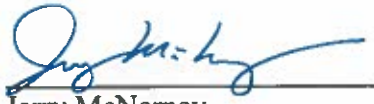
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David G. Valadao  
Member of Congress



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Doris Matsui  
Member of Congress



Jerry McNerney  
Member of Congress



Tony Cárdenas  
Member of Congress



Salud Carbajal  
Member of Congress



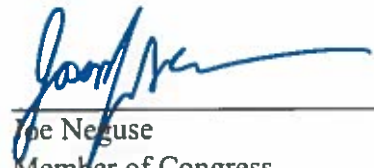
Jay Obernolte  
Member of Congress



Young Kim  
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Mike Levin  
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Joe Neguse  
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Peter A. DeFazio  
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Barbara Lee  
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Darrell Issa  
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Ami Bera, M.D.  
Member of Congress